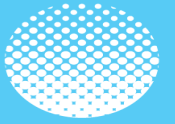




UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA



INSTITUTE FOR
GOVERNANCE
& POLICY ANALYSIS

Privacy & Prejudice: Why individuals choose not to disclose their disability in the Australian Public Service

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Outline

- Aim
- Background
- Data source
- Findings
- Implications for workplaces

Aim

To find out why individuals chose not to disclose their disability in the workplace.

To allow people with a disability their own voice in describing their decisions.

Previous works in this area

Reasons to disclose

- Gain support
- Give perspective
- Be taken seriously

Reasons not to disclose

- Fear of discrimination
- Previous bad experiences
- Anticipation of negative implications
- Not to be reduced to their disability but be seen as a whole person

To tell or not to tell: Disability Disclosure in the Australian Public Service

I've also studied

- a) the impacts perceived bullying behaviour has on disclosure and
- b) how various demographic attributes (age, gender, work classification levels) impact disclosure.

Future work will look at if the timing of acquisition of a disability impacts on disclosure.

Australian Public Service

Large

At 31 December 2018, more than 147 000 people were employed in the APS.

This does not include serving members of the defence force, nor teachers, police and ambulance officers who are employed under state public services.

Australian Public Service

Diverse in jobs and location

A broad range of jobs are available in the Public Service.

Work across and in all states and territories and overseas.

APS State of the Service Employee Census

The APS State of the Service Employee Census is an online survey delivered annually to every federal public servant employed under the *Public Service ACT 1999*.

Using 2013 data:

167,257 public servants.

102,219 answered (66% response rate).

6,774 self reported having a disability (6.8% of respondents)

Definition used in the data

“A person has a disability if they report that they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least six months and restricts everyday activities.”

This allows for a broad range that can include;

- Sensory
- Mental
- Physical
- Diseases
- Learning

Limitations to the data

Do not know what type of disability a respondent has.

Anonymous nature of the census means that answers cannot be clarified.

Respondents could choose not to answer any question. This means data may not be captured.

Number of people who have a disability

Question asked:

Do you have an ongoing disability?

Answer options:

- Yes
- No

6,774 respondents selected yes.

Is your disability recorded in your agency's HR system?

Yes	53.0%
No – I chose not to inform	14.5%
No – I have never been asked for this information	12.7%
No – for another reason	4.2%
Not sure	15.6%

Is your disability recorded in your agency's HR system?

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If you selected 'No – I chose not to inform' in the item above, could you please explain why you chose not to inform your agency?

Data and Methodology

880 individual responses

Comments ranged from single word answers to whole paragraphs which could encompass more than one theme

Each response was read and assigned a number (or multiple numbers) based on the themes contained therein

Data and Methodology

From literature certain themes were expected

- Fear of negative consequences
- Discrimination

However, some themes emerged from the data.

Where comments are given as examples, all attempts have been made to correct minor spelling and grammar issues

Overview of themes

My disability does not affect my work

When my disability starts to impact my work I will inform my agency

Privacy

Lack of trust in agency

Fear of discrimination

I have been discriminated against before

My team/supervisor is aware of my disability but my agency does not know

Recent diagnosis

Theme

My disability does not affect my work



My disability does not affect my work

Although my condition is long-term and affects me daily, it has no impact on my capacity to perform my job at any time.

I can manage my situation therefore there is no requirement to disclose and I do not want to be treated differently.

Theme – Subtheme

When my disability starts to impact my work I will
inform my agency

When my disability starts to impact my work I will inform my agency

It is being managed and I do not require additional support from my agency. If and when I do require additional support at work, I will consider informing my agency.

Currently has little effect on my ability to perform my duties. I would inform if the condition worsens.

Theme

Fear of discrimination

Fear of Discrimination

I have found that informing results in inappropriate treatment and I am considered less capable than others.

Fear of loss of job, ill treatment, discrimination

Regardless of what people say officially, mental health conditions are taboo and would impact negatively on how supervisors view me.

Theme – Subtheme
I have been discriminated against before

I have been discriminated against before

I cant recall whether I have informed HR about this or not. While I am sure things have been improved I have been discriminated against in my employment in the past and don't feel like trusting anyone with this information unless I am compelled to reveal it.

A previous manager was advised of my medical condition, and a new medical regime, and subsequently he had my time sheets investigated. I feel that my medical condition is not understood in my workplace and I expect no support or understanding.

Perceived bullying and harassment from the 2013 APS Employee Census

Percentage of respondents who reported being bullied and/or harassed in the last 12 months

Overall	16%
People with a disability	30%

Theme Privacy

Privacy

It's my personal business

Privacy - it is no-ones business but my own, I choose who and when to tell

Do not want to disclose this information.

Because I don't want to

Theme – Subtheme
Lack of trust in the Agency

Lack of trust in the Agency

Not comfortable it won't be used inappropriately

Do not trust what would be done with the information

I don't particularly trust the HR people not to gossip.

*Our department lacks integrity keeping this
information confidential*

Theme

My team/supervisor is aware of my disability but
my agency does not know



My team/supervisor is aware of my disability but my agency does not know

Although not having informed the 'agency' formally (i.e. via HR) I have informed my immediate manager. I have found this has enabled my condition to be managed discreetly and with context, rather than perhaps being categorised as having a disability, but from afar - and without a meaningful context.

Theme

Recent Diagnosis

Recent Diagnosis

The problem has occurred within the last eighteen months and it is only now that it is apparent that it is not a temporary issue

Recent diagnosis - treatment to be finalised

The possibility of the issues being corrected via surgery

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Recent diagnosis

Implications for workplaces

1. Do you need to know?

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2. Acknowledgement that personal circumstances can change over time

Implications for workplaces

1. Do you need to know?
2. Acknowledgement that personal circumstances can change over time
3. Crack down on discrimination

Implications for workplaces

1. Do you need to know?
2. Acknowledgement that personal circumstances can change over time
3. Crack down on discrimination
4. Build trust

What the Australian Public Service has been doing

- *As One: Making it Happen – APS Disability Employment Strategy 2016-2019*
- RecruitAbility
- APS Disability Champions Network

In 2018 APS Employee Census 8.7% self reported having a disability.

Questions?